UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social
Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.16/2001/3
10 April 2001

Original: ENGLISH

COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
FOR DEVELOPMENT
Fifth session
Geneva, 28 May – 1 June 2001
Item 3 of the provisional agenda

COMPREHENSIVE NOTE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AND PROGRESS MADE ON DECISIONS TAKEN AT THE FOURTH SESSION

Note by the secretariat

Executive summary

The present note has been prepared by the UNCTAD secretariat in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 1999/274 on the report of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development on its fourth session and the provisional agenda and documentation for the fifth session of the Commission. In particular, it addresses work carried out during the inter-sessional period 1999–2001 in such areas as partnerships and networking, biotechnology, coalition of resources, science and technology policy reviews, and coordination of work in science and technology.

GE.*200105129 5* LS

ENG

1. In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 1999/274, the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD) is to review at its fifth session the implementation of, and progress made on, decisions taken at its fourth session. Further to that decision, the present note has been prepared by the secretariat as a background document for the Commission's consideration of this agenda item. Details on activities relevant to this request are to be found also in document E/CN.16/2001/5, prepared for the current session of the Commission.

2. As part of the follow-up activities to the earlier work of the Commission on *partnerships and networking for national capacity-building*, the secretariat was requested (a) to identify and analyse best practices in partnering and networking; and (b) to create an inventory of opportunities for international science and technology partnerships and networking. In response to these requests, the secretariat undertook a study on partnerships and networking in science and technology for development. This study is before the Commission.[1]

3. Furthermore, the evolving *Science and Technology for Development Network* (S&TD Net), a reference website expected to become a portal on science and technology for development partly addresses those requests. Hyperlinks pointing to some good partnerships and networking programmes in the UN system and elsewhere have already been created. The links created include the following categories: research partner locator; technology marketplace; technology partnership practices; regulations and policies facilitating international science and technology partnerships; promotion and technical assistance for networks in developing countries; and register of international science and technology networks. More sources of information on partnering and networking will be identified and included in S&TD Net, while information on those already included will be updated as often as possible. Visitors to the site are invited to suggest new websites dealing with this issue or with other issues related to science and technology for development.

4. On *biotechnology for food production*, it was recommended that the Commission, through its secretariat, initiate a dialogue that involves the public and private sectors, non-governmental organizations and specialized biotechnology centres and networks, with a view to fostering the exchange of ideas among scientists, policy-makers, representatives of industry and end-users. Also, the secretariat was requested to assist in identifying and disseminating balanced information on biotechnology, intellectual property rights and biosafety; examine case studies on these issues; prepare the next issue of the Advanced Technology Assessment System (ATAS) bulletin on biotechnology for food production; and cooperate with other international and regional organizations to build understanding and to exchange information on biosafety regulation and capacity-building, including through case studies on partnerships, biosafety, bioethics and approaches to biotechnology and intellectual property rights issues.

5. The above requests were addressed by the Commission and the secretariat through a number of activities, including four panel meetings on biotechnology; information published either on the website of UNCTAD's Division on Investment, Technology and Enterprise Development (DITE), or in DITE's two Internet discussion groups and on S&TD Net; exchange of information through publications; e-mail, faxes and other means of telecommunication; participation in meetings and other events organized by several UN

[1] E/CN.16/2001/Misc.4.

agencies and other international organizations, including OECD, NGOs and research centres.[2]

6. It is in this context that five papers on legal and regulatory issues in biotechnology were published on the UNCTAD/DITE website at the following URL: http://www.unctad.org/en/subsites/dite/5_intgov/content_biosafety.htm. These include an issues paper prepared by the UNCTAD secretariat, two papers on biosafety by the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB), a paper on bioethics in Cuba, another one on national biotechnology policy in Ethiopia and a country case study for Paraguay.

7. Concerning the *ATAS bulletin*, the secretariat has recently (December 2000) published an issue of the bulletin on environmentally sound technologies[3] and is considering starting work on an issue on biotechnology for food production.

8. On *coalition of resources*, the secretariat was requested to finalize the publication of the reports on the coalition of resources for the application of information and communication technologies in transmissions infrastructure, education and health, and to ensure the widest dissemination of the final report. The reports on coalition of resources were prepared as part of the CSTD inter-sessional activities for the period 1995–1997 and were presented at the CSTD workshop held at the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in Addis Ababa from 17 to 18 November 1997. The report summarizing the studies presented at that workshop has already been prepared and will be disseminated as widely as possible, as requested by CSTD at its fourth session.

9. On *science and technology policy reviews*, it was recommended that the Commission continue to liase with UNCTAD on science, technology and innovation policy (STIP) reviews for interested countries in order to identify options for national action. UNCTAD remains committed to the programme on STIP reviews, subject to the availability of extra-budgetary resources. Requests for STIPs have been received from the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ecuador and Peru. Meanwhile, an Investment Policy Review for Ethiopia, which includes an explicit technological component at that country's request, has been prepared. Work is proceeding on a similar review for the United Republic of Tanzania.

10. In response to the Commission's decision on the *substantive theme for the 1999–2001 inter-sessional period*, namely "national capacity-building in biotechnology", and other activities, the Commission and the secretariat organized four meetings:

- A panel and CSTD Bureau meetings, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, from 2 to 3 September 1999, in conjunction with the International Conference on Biotechnology in the Global Economy, organized and hosted by the Center for International Development and the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard University;
- The first panel meeting on capacity-building in biotechnology, 11–13 April 2000, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran;

---

[2] See E/CN.16/2001/5.

[3] ATAS XII: The role of publicly funded research and publicly owned technologies in the transfer and diffusion of environmentally sound technologies. UNCTAD/ITE/IIP/9.

- The second panel meeting on legal and regulatory issues in biotechnology, 3–5 July 2000, Geneva, Switzerland;
- The third panel meeting on public awareness and participation in science-policy-making, 14–16 November 2000, Tunis, Tunisia;

Reports of these panel meetings are before the Commission.[4 5 6]

11. On the recurrent issue of *coordination of science and technology for development in the United Nations system*, the secretariat was urged, in collaboration with other United Nations bodies, to continue efforts to establish an electronic network linking information on their activities in science and technology for development and to build awareness of scientific developments that are particularly important for fostering economic development.

12. The secretariat responded to this request by setting up the above-mentioned Science and Technology for Development Network (S&TD Net), a website centralizing continuously updated information on most activities related to science and technology for development in the United Nations system and elsewhere. More details on S&TD Net can be found in the report entitled "The activities of the commission regarding coordination of science and technology for development and other inter-sessional activities" which is before the current session.[7]

13. As to the request that it continue to issue the *regular newsletter* updating activities in the United Nations system pertaining to science and technology for development, including information on plans for and the results of the inter-sessional activities of the Commission itself, the secretariat opted to use the Internet (website and e-mail lists) as a quicker and less costly communication medium with the potential to generate more feedback. It is in this spirit that all panel meetings were announced on the DITE website and on the CSTD discussion list, as well as on STD@topica.com. Results of panel meetings were also promptly published on the web.

14. The Commission and the secretariat responded to the call to identify and take advantage of opportunities to interact closely with other bodies of the United Nations system in order to promote greater information exchange and coordination of activities in science and technology for development. The secretariat participated in the meeting of the Inter-Agency Network for Safety in Biotechnology in April 2000 in Vienna, Austria. Also, it briefed participants in the fifth session of the UNCTAD Commission on Investment, Technology and Related Financial Issues. The Chairman of the CSTD attended the OECD Working Party on Biotechnology from 2 to 4 October 2000 in Paris. In addition, the secretariat took part in the Ad Hoc Expert Group Meeting on Science and Technology for the Development of Least Development Countries (LDCs), which was held in New York from 12 to 14 March 2001.

15. The recommendation that every other year one panel meeting be held in Geneva was implemented when the second panel meeting on legal and regulatory issues in biotechnology took place. At the end of the meeting, held in Geneva from 2 to 5 July 2000, the Bureau met

---

[4] E/CN.16/2001/Misc. 1.
[5] E/CN.16/2001/Misc. 2.
[6] E/CN.16/2001/Misc. 3.
[7] E/CN.16/2001/5.

the Geneva-based delegations of member States and observers to discuss with them the status of the inter-sessional activities of the Commission and its efforts to coordinate the activities of the United Nations system pertaining to science and technology. Unfortunately, not many delegations attended the meeting.

16. Finally, in response to a request that it prepare a succinct analytical report on relevant activities within the United Nations system, including the outcome of the World Science Conference, the secretariat has prepared document E/CN.16/2001/5, which is before the current session for discussion under agenda item 6.